

### Planning Assistance Grant Program: Questions and Responses:

1. Question: Can Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) submit/participate in more than one application?

Answer: Yes. Municipalities may only be involved in one application, but RPAs are not limited.

2. Question: In regard to RPAs and the use of funds such as District Local Technical Assistance as the match against a Planning Grant, would a letter from the appropriate official, such as a Committee Chair, suffice to commit RPA resources at the time of application (as would a letter from an appropriate local official)?

Answer: Yes, a letter of commitment from an appropriate RPA official will be acceptable as match documentation.

3. Question: Can you explain the math on the matching requirement of 25%; is the match \$12,500 if one receives \$50,000?

Answer: Yes, the minimum match against a grant of \$50,000 is \$12,500. Similarly, a grant of \$10,000 would require a minimum match of \$2,500.

4. Question: Can RPA funds/staff time be used to match a local application?

Answer: Yes.

5. Question: Can one match a state grant with the services of the municipal planner? Those of a planner employed by a regional planning agency? What about overhead?

Answer: Yes, the services of professional planner employed by a municipality or RPA can be used as match, and overhead can be included. Calculate hourly rate x hours committed. For example, a planner whose services, including overhead, cost a community or RPA \$50/hr. x 10 hours would account for a match of \$500.

6. Question: Would completion of a Climate Vulnerability Assessment be an eligible activity?

Answer: Yes, but not necessarily the most competitive of applications. Communities interested in an Assessment would be better served applying to a future Massachusetts Climate Vulnerability Preparedness Program grant round.

7. Question: When will the next round of grants from the Climate Vulnerability Preparedness Program be available?

Answer: April 2018.

8. Question: In regard to climate vulnerability efforts, would doing the work necessary to evaluate means of protecting a pump station in the floodplain (moving it, elevating it, protecting it, etc.) be eligible? How about the engineering analysis necessary to address a sub-standard culvert?

Answer: Yes, both are eligible.

9. Question: Can the Program fund construction (e.g. enlargement of a culvert)?

Answer: No, this is a planning and not an infrastructure program. There are insufficient funds to pay for physical improvements.

10. Question: Can a grant pay for several aspects of a project, for example an economic analysis of the impact of a zoning change and the public outreach process associated with that same zoning change?

Answer: Yes, these would be two tasks associated with a single zoning related proposal.

11. Question: If we have an existing regulatory incentive that encourages good stormwater practices, and want we want to utilize funds to promote use of the incentive, would this be eligible?

Answer: Yes.

12. Question: Will there be another round of grants next year if the program is now committing both FY18 and FY19 funds?

Answer: Yes. It is expected that some FY19 funds will be reserved and the grant round next year would also commit FY20 funds.

13. Question: Would you have a problem if you received a number of propels from groups of communities or RPAs seeking the maximum of \$50,000 for each participant – for example a group of five communities each seeking the maximum for a total of \$250,000?

Answer: The program has about \$1.5 million to distribute, so the hope is that applicants will be reasonable in their requests. In the event it becomes necessary EEA can work with applicants to reduce the scope and cost of proposals in order to make them affordable with the funds appropriated.

14. Question: When should we expect to hear about which proposals have been selected for funding?

Answer: In late November or early December – about a month after proposals are due on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. The goal is to have all contracts signed before the end of the calendar year.

15. Question: Would site-specific analysis/planning be eligible? Competitive?

Answer: Site-specific plans are favored over Master Plans because they are more likely to lead to action in the near term. An applicant should indicate how the plan would advance sustainable development on the site.

16. Question: Would a sidewalk inventory be eligible?

Answer: Yes - and the application will be more competitive if tied to broader goals and there are clear indications that the inventory will be used to take concrete action.

17. Question: What does the sentence “...applications from RPAs may be weighted on a community-by-community/task-by-task basis in order to ensure equitable scoring” mean?

Answer: This provision is necessary to address applications involving multiple communities where not all participating communities have received points associated with some of the criteria. For example, not all communities involved in an application may have executed a Community Compact. The score for the application as a whole would be weighted appropriately based on all communities participating.

18. Question: Can we get communities to apply for a Best Practice before October 23<sup>rd</sup> in order to earn the points associated with the Community Compact criterion?

Answer: Yes. If a community has never applied to the Community Compact Cabinet they can do so. If they have already signed a Compact they will earn those points. If a community with a signed Compact wishes to apply for more Best Practices then they must have completed all prior Best Practice commitments before they can pursue new ones.

19. Question: Could we pursue improvements to our wastewater treatment plant and higher density zoning in a single application?

Answer: We would interpret those as distinct activities and both could not be pursued in a single application.

20. Question: Would you be willing to extend the due date?

Answer: No, while sympathetic to the challenge of meeting the deadline, we are not going to do so.

21. Question: Could we work with communities in another state? Watersheds, habitat, etc. cross municipal boundaries.

Answer: EEA cannot expend funds out of state. But, letters of support from communities out of state would suffice to receive credit for an inter-municipal or regional application.

22. Question: Can the application be sent in soft copy (emailed) by the due date?

Answer: No, a physical copy of the proposal must arrive at EEA by 5pm on October 23<sup>rd</sup> to be eligible.

23. Question: I am working with a city that is developing a bike path that will directly link to a bike path in an adjoining town. MassDOT has identified funds for final design and construction of the path, but the city is struggling to pay for the cost of bringing the bike path to 25% engineering design. Can Planning Assistance Grant funding be used to fill the funding gap for bike path design?

Answer: Regrettably, with the exception of a project implementing a specific Climate Vulnerability Assessment recommendation, a project that is for engineering leading toward the development of bid documents, rather than conceptual level planning, would not be eligible. The Commonwealth is aware of the “gap” in funding for this sort of engineering/design work and conversations are underway under the auspices of Gov. Baker’s “Trails Team” about how to fund this important work.

24. Question: Can our 1422 grant be used as match for the EEA Planning Assistance Grant? One of the project ideas we have is related to affordable housing/infill development/village center zoning changes based on recent Housing Plans we’ve done for several of our towns. We thought that our 1422 funded work would be a great way to leverage the EEA planning grant funding. Here is some background information on 1422 grants:

- The funding is from the Federal Centers for Disease Control State and funds Local Public Health Actions to Prevent Obesity, Diabetes, and Heart Disease and Stroke DP14-1422PPHF14
- Monies went to Mass Dept. of Public Health and then to FRCOG
- Scopes of Work for funding are consistent across the country, with 5 tasks to further the improvement of walking networks, and the promotion of walking for health and everyday transportation. One of the tasks focuses on walking routes with emphasis on connectivity between housing, goods and services, and natural resources.

Answer: Yes, this funding appears to be akin to District Local Technical Assistance or Unified Planning Work Program funds and would be eligible for use as match.

25. Question: I have drafted the following preliminary list of proposals. Is it possible for you to give me some sense whether these – or any of these – are within the ball park of the sort of projects you are interested in funding?

1. Retain a consultant to review our current Site Plan Review ordinance to recommend amendments to make it a more effective tool for mandating ecologically sensitive design and for minimizing adverse impacts on the environment and on surrounding uses.
2. ...or, broader in scope: Retain a consultant to review our current Site Plan Review Ordinance, Zoning By-Law and Subdivision Control Rules & Regulations to recommend amendments to make them more effective tools for mandating ecologically sensitive design and for minimizing adverse impacts on the environment and on surrounding uses.
3. Feasibility study to identify possible locations and design for development of and maintenance plans for one or more “community gardens” throughout the community.
4. Development of a definitive plan for enhancement of municipally owned land adjacent to a public housing development for public park use and as part of the linkage between the waterfront and the downtown.
5. Definitive design of streetscape enhancements (including period lighting, landscaping, ADA-compliant crosswalks, pavement accents, and way-finding signage) for a Historic District (consisting of 47 dwellings).

6. Planning to identify locations for, and to acquire public open space and recreation land, especially along the waterfront, in the north end, that is not currently well-served with such facilities.
7. Feasibility study and design of a first link of a proposed “Historic Urban Trail” with stops at various locations with interpretive panels about the history of the river, and enhancement of the exposed riverbanks. This would include a focus on further design of the areas proposed by the MassDOT “Infra-space Program” study which proposed relocation of salt shacks, parking, and open space/recreation possibilities.

And added at a later time -

8. A land use study [for a large specified parcel of land] that would (a) identify and recommend possible changes in existing zoning to strengthen protection of valuable open space/ecological assets; (b) identify properties that would be proper targets for acquiring either fee simple absolute title or conservation easements; (c) review titles to lands that may be presumed to be protected but which may need corrective deeds or other corrections to title to make sure they are properly protected; (d) identify and propose public acquisition of “owner unknown” parcels; (e) identify stormwater easements, detention easements and other infrastructure and verify and confirm title.
9. Develop a Forest Management, Biodiversity and Stewardship Plan [for the large specified parcel of land]. This would address questions such as: How do we deal with invasive species? Should there be a prescribed burning program? What are proper natural habitat goals for this reserve? What age of forest growth should be encouraged/maintained? Generally, what elements should a stewardship plan include to maximize the contribution land to mitigation of climate change and community resilience?

Answer: All of the activities you list are eligible. Without the benefit of a full proposal they would be rated roughly in this order from most competitive to least: 2, 1, 6, 4, 5, 7, and 3. Generally the broader and more immediate the impact the better. Also, the program favors planning related activity. And, in response to the later addition of #8 and #9 – Neither would be at the top of the list. #9 is eligible for a Stewardship Grant from the Dept. of Fish and Game. Applications are due October 30 – see <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/masswildlife-habitat-management-grant-program>. #8 is something EEA would be happy to talk with further outside of this planning grant process, but the community would be better served by applying for a grant for some of the other concepts listed.

26. Question: Would you be willing to alter set aside #2 – Actions implementing the results of a Climate Vulnerability Assessment – to also allow for the set aside funds to be used for climate change adaptation related activities that are not explicitly tied to a completed Assessment?

Answer: No, in order to encourage completion of Climate Vulnerability Assessments and to reward those who have done them EEA is not willing to alter this set aside. Activities that are not explicitly tied to a completed Assessment are eligible for funding, just not the \$250,000 set aside.